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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3206  
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RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0417  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2376  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001408

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS  
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: RUMORS ABOUND ABOUT KARUNA'S  
WHEREABOUTS

REF: COLOMBO 709

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O Blake, for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY: On October 8, the Hindustan Times reported that pro-government paramilitary Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) military commander Chandrakanthan, more commonly known as Pillaiyan, ousted the group's founder Karuna Amman from the party's Executive Committee over "financial irregularities." Quoting TMVP Spokesman Asad Mowlana, the Times asserted that Karuna had fled to the UK using a false Sri Lankan passport and a British visa obtained with the help of the GSL. On October 10, the Daily Mirror published an article quoting TMVP Batticaloa Political Chairman T. Thileepan as denying a split in the Karuna group, but acknowledging that Karuna was "overseas on official matters." Sources from the TMVP's heartland of Batticaloa have told us that the split in the TMVP is "political theater" designed to rehabilitate the image of the group in time for elections in the East before the end of the year. Other sources in London told us that Karuna met with a prominent asylum attorney, and likely would not return to Sri Lanka. Others are less certain. Our contacts assert that Karuna has amassed millions of dollars from abductions-for-ransom, extortion and other criminal enterprises, and that he has been compelled to share these with the Sri Lankan officials who helped him leave. Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa has publicly confirmed that

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Karuna was "abroad." In September, Gothabaya Rajapaksa approached us seeking help in persuading the British to give Karuna a visa. British High Commission diplomats have assured us that they have not issued a visa to Karuna, saying that the British government would probably move quickly to deport him if he were in the UK. END SUMMARY.

ALLEGATIONS OF A SPLIT IN THE TMVP

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12. (SBU) On October 8, the Hindustan Times reported that TMVP political leader Karuna Amman, rarely referred to by his legal name Vinayakamoorthy Muralitharan, was expelled from the 27-member TMVP Executive Committee at the direction of TMVP military commander Pillaiyan because of "financial irregularities." Two days later, TMVP Batticaloa Political Chairman T. Thileepan publicly denied a split in the Karuna group, questioning how such baseless rumors can get started. (The Hindustan article quoted extensively from TMVP Spokesman Asad Mowlana, who has been silent since the article was published.) Thileepan asserted that Karuna remained the TMVP's national political leader while Pillaiyan continued as the group's military commander. Thileepan asserted that Karuna was overseas on official business, but did not identify Karuna's location.

13. (S) An Embassy contact, a prominent Batticaloa journalist with reliable sources within the TMVP, told us that rumors of a split between Karuna and Pillaiyan are half-truths, designed to be "good political theater" directed at the international community. According to our contact, the GSL initially orchestrated the rumor of a split in July and spread stories that Pillaiyan was responsible for human rights abuses within the Karuna group (reftel). The GSL was hoping to extricate Karuna from the taint of human rights abuses, enabling him to contest anticipated elections in the East before the end of the year. The charade even involved sending two high-level TMVP officials to meet with Poloff seeking asylum because of fear that Pillaiyan would kill them (reftel). However, the international community refused to accept the "rehabilitated" Karuna. Further, Karuna ran afoul of the GSL when he criticized the government for allowing "Jaffna Tamils" from the paramilitaries TULF, PLOTE and EPRLF

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to unite as a possible political rival to the TMVP in the East.

14. (S) According to the Batticaloa journalist, when it became clear that Karuna could not be rehabilitated, and that Karuna was not as pliable as previously believed, the GSL reversed strategy, deciding to remove Karuna while allowing the more easily controlled Pillaiyan to stay in Sri Lanka. This strategy was especially appealing because other Tamil paramilitaries less stigmatized by the international community than the Karuna group had united under a pro-government umbrella to contest elections in the East. Our source emphasized that there was no Karuna/Pillaiyan split because of financial irregularities. Instead, it was orchestrated to continue using the TMVP as an armed paramilitary group capable of fighting the LTTE, while providing "plausible deniability" to the GSL on human rights abuses. According to the journalist, the GSL specifically wanted to remove Karuna before the current visit of U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour.

#### ALLEGATIONS OF PASSPORT AND VISA FRAUD

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15. (S) The Hindustan Times alleged in its October 8 article that the GSL helped Karuna obtain a Sri Lankan passport using a false Sinhalese name, Gunawardene, in order to secure a British visa. According to this version, Airport Aviation Director Wijesundera helped arrange Karuna's departure. However, other Embassy contacts suggested that Karuna did not use a false passport, but instead used his little-known legal name, Vinayakamoorthy Muralitharan. British High Commission officers have told us that they do not believe that Karuna has entered the UK. Despite this, Embassy contacts have reported that Karuna met last week in London with a prominent Tamil asylum attorney named Sivakumaran, also known as Raghavan. According to Embassy contacts, Sivakumaran's wife Nirmala Nithyanandan, formerly associated with the LTTE, knew Karuna before his split from the Tigers in 2004. However, Embassy sources believe that Karuna was introduced to

Sivakumaran by former EPDP spokesman S. Thavarajah, who fled Sri Lanka in July 2007 after helping two LTTE cadres escape arrest by the GSL.

¶16. (S/NF) Approximately one month ago, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa approached Ambassador seeking our intervention to obtain a British visa for Karuna, so he can join his family who reportedly live in the UK. UK High Commission colleagues have repeatedly told us, however, that they are not interested in helping Karuna reach the UK, have not issued him a visa, and that HMG would likely seek to deport Karuna promptly if he managed to reach British shores.

#### ALLEGATIONS OF FINANCIAL PAYOFFS

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¶17. (S) Embassy contacts allege that Karuna has amassed at least several million dollars since 2004 from abductions, extortion and other criminal enterprises. Our Batticaloa contact asserted that the GSL agreed to allow Karuna to leave Sri Lanka permanently to join his family, who reportedly have been in the UK for several months. Despite the GSL's public denials of any association with the Karuna group, Gothabaya Rajapaksa has publicly confirmed that Karuna is "abroad," but did not specify Karuna's current location.

¶18. (S) COMMENT: The rampant rumors about Karuna aside, we actually know very little. It seems reasonable to conclude at this point that Karuna is not in Sri Lanka. He has certainly amassed significant wealth through criminal

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enterprises. If Karuna departed Sri Lanka with GSL facilitation, it is more than likely that that he shared some of his ill-gotten gains with the officials who helped him leave. If Karuna is in the UK, it is unclear whether the British mistakenly issued a visa to Karuna under his lesser-known legal name, or whether the GSL provided Karuna with a false identity to secure a British visa. Whether Karuna intends to return after conducting his "official business" is not clear, much less the future role that he or the GSL envision for himself in Eastern politics. One well informed Minister told us the Government continues to plan an on-going role for Karuna in the East in the hopes that the TMVP can contest future elections and provide an alternative to the Tamil National Alliance, which is closer to the LTTE and vigorously opposed to many GSL policies.

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